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ABSTRACT

This statement paper articulates the National Urban League's position that public education has failed to fulfill its mission for many students in general and for black and poor students in particular. The statement reviews recent education reports, delineates the League's position on current educational issues, and suggests programmatic responses. The following are discussed: (1) the inextricability of educational excellence and equity; (2) the primary role of Federal and State governments in public education; (3) proper expenditure of school resources to achieve equity of educational results; (4) elimination of biased teaching attitudes; (5) involvement of business and industry in supporting public school education; (6) quality education and equity of educational results in areas where population shifts and demographic changes mitigate against racial desegregation; (7) curriculum reform; (8) universal, free early childhood and kindergarten education; (9) equity in competency testing; (10) quality vocational education; the necessity of leadership roles for organizations within the black community; (11) the shared accountability of governments, school systems, administrators, teachers, parents, and the black community at large; (12) increasing the pool of black, minority, and poor students who are prepared to enter and complete college; and (13) improving the quality of teaching and increasing the pool of Black teachers. (KH)

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NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE EDUCATION STATEMENT - MAY 17, 1984
THIRTY YEARS AFTER BROWN

"WE CONCLUDE THAT, IN THE FIELD OF PUBLIC EDUCATION, SEPARATE BUT EQUAL HAS NO PLACE...."
-Brown vs. Topeka, May 17, 1954

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Thirty years after Brown, a plethora of education reports have recently focused the general public's attention on a condition that black and poor students and parents have known about for many years.

Public education is failing to fulfill its mission for many students in general and for black and poor students in particular.

Thirty years after Brown, the National Urban League, in concert with its historic 75-year mission, is continuing to advocate for the improvement of education of black, poor and minority students.

Thirty years after Brown, the League sees a critical need to improve education for black, poor and other minority students; for if the "rising tide of mediocrity" is a threat to the general student population, its disproportionately devastating impact on our constituents can be indisputably documented. If the nation is at risk, as the National Commission's Report proposes, black, poor and other minority students are under siege, and their very survival is threatened.

John Hope Franklin and Kenneth Clark, in their foreword statement in A Policy Framework for Racial Justice, stated that "despite the progress generated by the Brown Decision of 1954, despite the civil rights laws of 1964 and 1965, despite the nonviolent civil disobedience movement directed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,...we are indeed at the most difficult stage in the quest for [educational equity] and racial justice."

The League supports the policy framework proposed by the authors of the report, which includes accountability for black and minority student achievement on the part of public school administrators, teachers, legislators, students and parents.

The policy framework further indicates the need for a federal role in education

which supports funding, and the protection of the civil rights of black, poor and other minority students.

Nearly 40 years ago, W. E. Dubois issued a prophetic statement regarding the persistence of pernicious and fundamental inequities in our society. He suggested that black scholars (educators) would have to bring their collective intelligence to bear on a solution to the problem.

The following statement on education, thirty years after the Brown Decision, articulates the National Urban League's position on current educational issues, suggests programmatic responses and calls upon black educators to heed Dr. Dubois' recommendation.

The National Urban League has, throughout its history, been concerned with the educational enfranchisement of black, poor and other minority people. During this time, Urban League affiliates have, with the technical assistance of the National Office, developed and implemented a variety of educational initiatives designed to assist the established educational institutions in improving their service delivery.

Urban League affiliates have provided direct services, such as tutorial programs, early childhood education, career guidance, role modeling and parental involvement programs. The Urban League Movement has advocated for policies and programs designed to improve the educational system for black and poor students and their parents.

Black and poor students are major consumers of education and, if demographic projections are correct, they will form an even greater percentage of the public school's constituency in the future. Education has been and will remain a major tool for the economic empowerment of blacks and other minorities.

Seven of the reports on education have been reviewed within the framework of the League's historical commitment to quality education and its role in advocating for

the implementation of programs to achieve that goal.

The current education reform movement prompted by these reports provides an unparalleled opportunity for the National Urban League to develop strategies designed to prod the educational system into fulfilling its mission with respect to black students, parents and teachers.

In general, the recommendations promulgated by the reports left the basic operational structure of the educational system intact. With the exception of The Paideia Proposal, the essential reorganization of the educational service delivery system was largely omitted from consideration. Among the recommendations, these reports called for more time to be devoted to the actual teaching process, lengthening the school day and year, involvement of the business community, teacher/student competency testing and additional courses in the basic skills areas.

Although the primary responsibility for fiscal support lies at the state and local levels, reformation of the school finance structure at the state and local levels was not subjected to indepth analysis by the reports. The proposed recommendations tend to place the major responsibility for educational reform on teachers, students and parents, a strategy which insinuates that they are the reasons why the problem exists.

We call upon the educational establishment, administrators, legislators, and policymakers to implement reform efforts which do not call upon the consumers of education or constituents to bear the major responsibility for educational reform.

The National Urban League rejects this country's periodic, "Peek-a-Boo, Now you see it, now you don't" approach to educational reform. We will provide continuous advocacy for education reform until we judge the educational system to be functioning effectively for all students.

The following section of this Statement delineates the National Urban League's position on a number of educational issues.

EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

The National Urban League reaffirms its commitment to quality education for all students in general and for black, poor and minority students in particular.

The National Urban League offers an expanded definition of "equity" which includes the concept of parity of educational results. Equity in the 1980's is redefined and holds that in addition to access, the educational system must provide a learning environment in which black and poor students are able to demonstrate results which are commensurate with those of white students. Equity of educational programs can be measured by outcomes, such as reduction of drop-out and push-out rates, improved attendance, improved retention rates of minorities in the four-year higher education programs, proportionate representation in programs for the gifted, reduction in the disproportionate representation of minority males in disciplinary actions, (such as suspensions and expulsions) and standardized test scores which more nearly approximate those of similar white populations.

Educational excellence and equity are inextricably interwoven. There can be no compromise, no sacrifice of one for the other.

We can neither ascribe to, nor can we condone the both subtle and often blatant insinuation in these reports that the quality of education has suffered because we have allowed minorities wider access to the educational system.

It should be noted for the record that some of the reports contained statements about equity and excellence in education. They are A Nation at Risk, High School, Making the Grade, Action for Excellence, The Paideia Report, A Place Called School, and Academic Preparation for College.

It is very significant that analyses and discussions of the reports largely ignored these statements. Had the "equity statement" contained in A Nation at Risk received as much publicity and exposure as the statement about "mediocrity", we might have witnessed a different "call to arms" and we might be witnessing a real reform movement.

The following reports contained statements about Equity:

A Nation at Risk asserts that "the twin goals of equity and high-quality schooling have profound and practical meaning for our economy and society, and we cannot permit one to yield to the other either in principle or in practice." (P.13) Action for Excellence recommends that we "provide quality assurance in education," to "serve better those students who are now unserved or underserved." (pp.10-11)

"Concern for educational quality should be expressed in ways that advance social justice. Educational quality must not lead to actions that limit the aspirations and opportunities of disadvantaged and minority youth, or that would reverse the progress that has already been made." Academic Preparation for College, (p.33)

Recommending a curriculum change, Ernest Boyer in High School stresses that "...in the debate about public schools, equity must be seen not as a chapter of the past but as the unfinished agenda of the future. To expand access without upgrading schools is simply to perpetuate discrimination in a more subtle form. But to push for excellence in ways that ignore the needs of less privileged students is to undermine the future of the nation. Clearly, equity and excellence cannot be divided." (p.60)

The Paideia Proposal states "...to give the same quality of schooling to all requires a program of study that is both liberal and general, and that is, in several, crucial, overarching respects, one and the same for every child." (p.21) A Place Called School recommends the elimination of tracking and ability grouping as the primary change

that would, along with improved instruction, create greater equity in access to learning for all students. (p.319) Finally, Ernest Boyer offered the following comment on equity in High School. "Lessening segregation and stereotyping by class, race, gender and ethnicity requires not only unprejudiced attitudes...but also changes in the structure of schooling."

The National Urban League pledges its resources to fulfilling the goals expressed in these statements.

THE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The National Urban League supports the Statement in A Nation at Risk regarding the role of the federal government in education.

"The federal government has the primary responsibility to identify the national interest in education and should help fund and support efforts to protect and promote that interest..."

In High School, Ernest Boyer supports a federal education role which would gather and disseminate information, and ensure quality education for special needs students.

Making the Grade provides mixed messages. The report derives its support for a federal role in education from the premise that the federal government is "charged with providing for the security and well-being of our democratic society which rests largely on a strong and competent system of public education." The federal government is urged to be a "firm but gentle goad to states and local communities." This is similar to the Supreme Court's admonishing the states to desegregate "with all deliberate speed." We have witnessed the lack of results of that famous equivocation.

The federal government's initial intervention in education in 1911 was prompted by the need to develop vocational education programs to protect children against the exploitation of child labor practices. Therefore, there is an historic precedent for the

federal role in education to function to protect the rights of black, poor and other minority students.

We recognize the reality of the New Federalism, the decentralization of the federal government's funding and administrative responsibilities and the current dimunition of its oversight and regulatory role.

The National Urban League will, however, continue to advocate for a strong federal role in education. The federal government has a moral responsibility to support and implement programs and protect the civil and constitutional rights of black, poor and minority students. It must provide regulatory/oversight mechanisms to ensure that this aspect of its responsibility is discharged.

The federal government should provide leadership in funding research, teacher training and should continue to make available sufficient funds targeted to student populations evidencing specific educational needs.

The National Urban League's education network has, and will continue to work, at the local level to ensure that state and local governments discharge their full responsibility to ensure quality public education for black, poor and other minority students.

SCHOOL FINANCE

Resources should be deployed where they are needed to achieve the equity of educational results for black, poor and minority students. Urban school systems have disproportionately higher operating costs. Larger city school districts have higher costs for support services, and greater needs for special services for minority, handicapped and other educationally "at risk" students.

The National Urban League opposes proposals, such as tuition tax credits and vouchers, which divert tax dollars from public education. Urban school systems are experiencing a reduction in their tax bases causing tremendous financial strains

on the local communities. Several states have attempted to change the distribution of tax dollars for education funding. The resulting formulae, which are ostensibly designed to equalize the funding for school districts, have not had the desired impact. In many states, no reforms of any consequence have been accomplished.

The League will continue to advocate for school finance policies and programs which place resources where they are most needed, and which will result in equitable educational results for black, poor and minority students.

GROUPING/TRACKING

The League supports classroom management strategies which group students for instruction. However, the League is opposed to any grouping of students for instruction which limits teachers' expectations of their students or students' expectations of themselves. The relationship between teachers' expectations and students' achievement is well-documented in the research literature. The programmatic responses to the recommendation for education reform largely omit discussion of the role which limited expectations play in obviating minority students' academic achievement. The League will advocate for and support teacher education programs which eliminate the behaviors caused by biased attitudes which limit teachers' expectations and consequently have an adverse impact on black and minority students' academic functioning.

We advocate that teachers demand and expect the maximum performance from every black, poor and minority student, and that they provide a learning atmosphere free of the debilitating negativism of racial bias.

BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT

The National Urban League has a long history of productive collaboration with business and industry and fully supports the reports which call for the business community to become more actively involved in supporting public school education.

Business and industry representatives, working closely with educators, can ensure that the content of vocational and career education courses reflects the requirements of the marketplace. They should support teacher training programs and the research and development of innovative educational strategies. Many businesses are supporting school-based activities through the "Adopt-a-School" program and should continue to do so where their contributions result in improving the delivery of educational services. Business can assist public education by providing jobs for our youth which enhance motivation and career development.

Business and industry leaders must work to ensure that there is continued public support for education and that all levels of government discharge their legal responsibilities for providing quality public education for all students. Business and industry's support of education should, in no way, allow the government to abdicate its responsibility, or to divert tax resources from the support of public education.

DESEGREGATION

The Brown versus Topeka Decision must be supported as the constitutional law of the land. However, where population shifts and demographic changes mitigate against or preclude the racial desegregation of schools, we must demand quality education and equity of educational results.

In some instances, desegregation still results in predominantly black or one race schools. When this occurs, the teaching and administrative staff should still reflect the ethnic diversity of the community and the society at large; and curricula should reflect and respect the history and the cultural values of the diverse racial and ethnic groups which comprise our society.

The original goal of desegregation was to improve the quality of education for all students. School desegregation was to be a process through which the twin goals of

equity and excellence in education could be achieved. The League will continue to devote its energies to reaching these goals.

CURRICULUM REFORM

The League supports the call to strengthen the academic curriculum for all students. However, there are three subject areas that are especially germane to the educational survival of our constituents; they are mathematics and science, black history and culture and computer technology.

Mathematics and Science:

The League supports the reports which called attention to the need to strengthen and expand science and mathematics education programs. In addition, we call attention to the critical lack of participation in the math/science pipeline by blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans. The Special Report commissioned by the Rockefeller Foundation, "Who Will Do Science?" by Sue E. Berryman documents the fact that blacks and Hispanics are grossly under-represented in the quantitative sciences and that they are not able to persist through the science/math pipeline into advanced degree programs in proportion to their representation in the population.

The League is committed to supporting the development and implementation of strategies to increase the pool of black and other minority students who are able to persist successfully through the math/science educational pipeline to postsecondary and advanced degree programs. The National Urban League supports the development and implementation of activities, such as math/science after-school programs, career guidance, motivational and awareness programs to achieve these goals.

Black History and Culture:

Another subject area is black history and culture. The National Urban League will support the development and implementation of activities to ensure that curricula reflecting the history and culture of black and other minorities, and the contributions

of these ethnic groups are included in appropriate areas of the public school curriculum. In addition, the National Urban League pledges to ensure and provide after-school supplemental support programs to teach black history and culture to black students.

Computer Technology:

The availability of computers is a grave concern. The widening gap between students who have access to educational technology (computer education) and those who have not, has been adequately documented. Studies show that there is a disparity between urban and suburban school districts in the allocation of resources for the purchase of computer hardware and software for instruction. Proportionately, suburban districts spend more on computer education than do urban districts.

The League advocates for and supports programs designed to provide black, poor and other minority students access to the appropriate use of computers. Computers should be used to develop critical thinking skills, logic and creativity.

The National Urban League advocates for and supports activities which provide black, poor and minority parents access to the use of computers through community-based programs. The National Urban League is committed to marshalling the necessary resources to prevent black, poor and minority students from becoming an underclass of technological illiterates.

EARLY CHILDHOOD/KINDERGARTEN

The National Urban League, in collaboration with its affiliates, has supported the implementation of early childhood and Head Start programs over the past 20 years.

The National Urban League is committed to advocating for universal, free early childhood and kindergarten education for all students in general, and for black, poor and minority students in particular.

Situations exist where black, poor and minority students are entering school for the first time at five and six years of age and competing educationally with students

who have had two or three years of stimulating pre-school experiences. In these situations, when so-called "readiness tests" are given, minority students' low scores do not reflect a lack of ability; they reflect the lack of exposure to educational experiences. Unfortunately, these test results are often used as indicators of the student's innate potential for achievement. The students are deemed incapable of performance. Little in the way of academic performance is expected and the students are thus programmed for failure at the outset of their school career.

The League continues to advocate for the development and implementation of programs to serve these populations. We are committed to improving services to black, poor and minority children who are being deprived of early childhood and kindergarten experience.

COMPETENCY TESTING/STANDARDS

The National Urban League unequivocally supports high-performance standards for teachers and students. We recognize that black, poor and minority student groups are more adversely affected by low standards and expectations than any other group.

In 1976, the National Urban League issued a Statement on competency testing which stated that schools must assess students' progress, provide instructional programs based on the assessment and provide parents with information about their children's progress, clearly articulating educational expectations. The Statement clearly articulated the rights and responsibilities of both parents and educators. It was adamant in stating that a support structure is absolutely essential if the processes which are initiated to achieve high educational standards, are to be equitably implemented. We cannot launch students upon the educational seas, expect all of them to row, while leaving some without oars.

The National Urban League reaffirms its Statement on competency testing which is as relevant today as it was in 1976 when initially issued. We are aware that test scores do not reflect the person's potential for achievement as much as they reflect

the educational experiences to which the student has been exposed. We note however, that there is a veritable testing craze abroad in the land. Tests will be used with increasing frequency to decide who shall or shall not pass through the portals of academia into economic security. Tests will be used to determine who shall and who shall not be accepted into technical and vocational schools. They will also be used increasingly to determine upward mobility through a range of occupations and careers.

The reasons for the disparities between minority and non-minority, rich and poor students' test scores have been hotly debated. The data show however, that when poor black and minority students are provided with (1) content information, (2) test-taking skills and (3) methods to reduce test anxiety, their scores can increase significantly.

It is, therefore, imperative that black, poor and minority students be equipped with test-taking skills.

The League is therefore committed to providing opportunities for black, poor and minority students to acquire test wiseness, test-taking skills and to ensure that these students are exposed to educational experiences which provide them with the academic content upon which they are to be tested.

The National Urban League remains unalterably opposed to the inappropriate use of tests results to limit access to educational programs and/or careers and occupations and/or to establish elitist educational programs. Tests should be used as diagnostic instruments to strengthen curriculum and improve instruction, and as a means to measuring progress toward educational goals.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The recommendations contained in the educational reports regarding vocational education range from eliminating it from the secondary curriculum completely, to providing on-the-job training and extensive job skills training.

The League has in the past advocated, and will continue to advocate, for quality

vocational educational programs. Quality vocational education includes rigorous academic preparation as well as job skills training. Quality vocational educational programs should be based on solid information about the economy. Quality vocational education necessitates cooperative efforts between businessmen and educators. Quality vocational education programs should provide opportunities for vocational education teachers to understand the marketplace in which they are preparing students to function.

Historically, blacks and minorities have viewed vocational programs with ambivalence, because these programs were often used as methods to send black students into "dead-end", economically unproductive occupations. Demographic figures indicate that minority populations will become an increasingly large percentage of the workforce during the late 1980's and 1990's. Currently, vocational/technical schools are preparing workers to enter the growth area careers and occupations. Black, poor and minority students must have access to these programs, especially since the increase in job opportunities will occur in the information processing and technical areas.

The League must, therefore, support the development and implementation of programs to acquaint black students and parents with opportunities to participate in quality vocational education.

LEADERSHIP

The National Urban League holds that the education of our children is too important to leave entirely to others. Organizations in the black community must assume a leadership role in the struggle for educational equity and the improvement of academic achievement for black, poor and minority students.

Blacks, through their churches, social, fraternal and other related organizations, must define the issues, conduct research and establish the goals for programmatic

initiatives. We must avoid developing programs based on social/educational deprivation philosophies, or models based on the premise that innate pathology exists in the black community.

Black parents are essential to the leadership process. Parents must take a leadership role in their local school organizations and should be encouraged to participate in local school board elections.

The National Urban League pledges to join with other organizations in the black community in providing leadership in the development and implementation of supplemental programs which will enrich, stimulate and nurture black students.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The National Urban League holds that school systems must be held accountable for fulfilling their mandated responsibility to educate black, poor and minority students. Accountability entails being expected to achieve reasonable, measurable goals.

Administrators and local school governance officials are responsible for providing resources and support systems for teachers and principals, and must be held accountable for so doing.

Parents and teachers set the educational climate in the schools and therefore are responsible for the achievement of their students. They should be held accountable for so doing.

The black community must provide surrogate activities and programs for the students whose parents, for whatever reasons, are unable to provide outside educational support systems.

The National Urban League holds that we, the black community, must hold ourselves accountable for ensuring that school systems educate black, poor and minority students.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The National Urban League is concerned about the poor retention rates of black students on predominantly white college campuses. About one of two black students who enter predominantly majority institutions complete their education. There is documentable evidence that, on many white campuses, black students encounter a lack of support systems, face double standards of discipline and racial hostility. On the other hand, black students who enter historically or predominantly black colleges and universities are much more likely to complete the four-year educational experience.

The National Urban League feels that the critical shortage of black, Hispanic and Native American faculty in higher education is a contributing factor to the inhospitable atmosphere which exists for black students on some predominantly white campuses. The retention and completion rates at historically and predominantly black institutions are in part indicative of the supportive environment, which exists for black students.

The League holds that black and poor students should be able to choose freely among the higher educational programs available to them. The National Urban League supports black colleges and acknowledges their invaluable role in educating black youth. We advocate that black and minority students should be able to choose from the full range of post secondary institutions

The National Urban League is committed to supporting the development and implementation of programs designed to increase the pool of black, poor and minority students who are prepared to enter and complete four-year institutions of higher education.

THE TEACHING PROFESSION

The National Urban League is concerned about the critical shortage of black teachers in elementary and secondary education. The shortage of black teachers is

exacerbated by competency testing programs which result in decreasng the pool of secondary students who enter college and also limit the numbers of black graduates who successfully complete the four-year college experience. It is essential that black teachers, administrators and academicians are present in school settings to function as role models for black students during their educational experience from pre-school through post-doctoral programs. We need black teachers who have the special understanding of the needs of black students derived from a shared history and experience.

The National Urban League supports the reports which call for teachers to be highly qualified. Quality teaching will result from improved teacher education programs. Teacher education must provide prospective teachers with expertise in their subject area, understanding of the variations of learning styles and most importantly, a respect for the learning ability of **all** students.

The National Urban League also supports the reports which indicated that teachers are underpaid. We are not, however, aware of any research to support the contention that an increase in salary alone will result in better teaching. We support just and fairly implemented plans to compensate teachers.

The National Urban League will use the resources of its educational network to join with black organizations to develop and implement support programs to increase the pool of well-prepared, well-paid black teachers.

CONCLUSION

The ideas, viewpoints and statements expressed in this document are derived from a shared system of beliefs and values within the Urban League Movement about the dignity of man, the ascendancy of the human spirit, and the worthiness of the goals we pursue: **EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY.** The Urban League Movement is a gadfly to the conscience of this nation. We hold a mirror to the

"underbelly" of this society so that its existence cannot be denied, and its victims go uncared for. **We will not relinquish our efforts to assist this country to live up to its moral and constitutional promise to black, poor and minority people.**